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SUBJECT: ONE OUT, SIX TO GO: AUTHORITIES RELEASE A "TRIAL OF SEVEN" DETAINEE BY REASON OF INSANITY

¶1. (SBU) On May 13 Shant Harutyunian, one of the prominent "Trial of Seven" political detainees before that case was broken up on April 1, 2009, was released from prison where he had been detained since his arrest on April 10, 2008. The court dropped the charges after finding that Harutyunian was not of sound mind (non compos mentis) during the events of March 1, 2008, for which he was charged for organizing "mass disturbances," and attempting to "usurp state power." The ruling followed completion of court-ordered medical and psychological evaluation. Harutyunian had been held in Nubarashen mental hospital since March 17 for this evaluation.

¶2. (SBU) Harutyunian complained to the media after his release that authorities had invented his alleged mental instability as a pretext to keep him from appearing in open court, which he contended would have been an embarrassment to them. The Armenian National Congress's legal representative also expressed doubt about the ruling, commenting that Harutyunian was "eccentric" but not insane.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: We suspect the authorities seized on Harutyunian's reputation for being "a little bit crazy" as a face-saving pretext to let him go, thereby reducing to six the number of high-profile defendants who had formerly been grouped together into the infamous "Trial of Seven." There were some reports that Harutyunian's questionable mental stability had deteriorated into outright paranoia during his prison stay, but the court's ruling was not that Harutyunian was not of sound mind to stand trial, but that he was not in his right mind during the alleged events. This move continues the authorities pattern of gradually getting out from under the "political prisoner" problem in the court of international opinion, while still trying hard not to do anything that might be seen as compromising the official narrative of events for the 3/1/08 violence -- a narrative that puts 100 percent of the blame on the "radical opposition."
YOVANOVITCH